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Articles in Today's Clips

Wednesday, April 30, 2008

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THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

Agency admits errors that left boy in harm's way

Wednesday, April 30, 2008

By Peter Luke

Press News Service

LANSING -- Apparent violations of Michigan law and department procedure contributed to last year's death of a 9-year-old Montcalm County boy under the watch of state child protection workers.

Nicholas Braman should have been removed from his father's home by Department of Human Services case workers after his father, Oliver Braman, pleaded guilty to felony child abuse charges involving the assault of Nicholas' two older brothers with a cattle prod.

While awaiting sentence on those charges, Braman killed Nicholas, his new wife and himself, in a murder-suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning.

During a Senate Families and Human Services Committee hearing Tuesday, Sen. Alan Cropsey, R-DeWitt, asked if a law was needed to compel DHS to seek court-ordered removal in a case where a parent already is guilty of child abuse.

"We do not recommend it because we believe child protection law already requires it," said Steve Yager, head of the DHS Office of Family Advocate.

In the Braman case, in which Nicholas should have been released into the care of his mother, Rebecca Jasinski, Cropsey said, "The law was not followed; is that what you're saying?"

"That's correct," Yager answered.

In a steady, even voice, Jasinski, a Saginaw accountant, told lawmakers "every day I think of Nicky, and it sears my soul to know what happened that night to him. I believe he hoped to be rescued.

"I want to know not only how a government agency that is founded on the principle of children's safety and well-being could so not do their job," she said. "How is it that it has gotten that bad?"

She said her two older sons, now 15 and 14, are emotionally scarred from the abuse they suffered at the hands of their father. She blamed her younger son's death on a legal bureaucracy that defeated her rights as a mother and a child protection system plagued by "wriggle room."

Stacie Bladen, an investigator with the Office of Children's Ombudsman, an oversight agency, said during the hearing "all the facts in this case suggest it shouldn't have happened. It was bad decision-making all the way around."

A DHS investigation report on the case released in February said Nicholas was not removed from the home because "professionals involved in the case ... reported that Mr. Braman appeared to be taking positive steps to assure a safe home environment for his son."

DHS Director Ismael Ahmed Tuesday expanded on that report, saying those professionals indicated that Oliver Braman's "demeanor was cooperative and calm. They observed loving interactions between father and son. The older boys acknowledged that Nicholas had never been abused."

"I'm not going to make excuses, but I want you to know other factors that weighed on the decision to allow

Nicholas to remain in his father's care," Ahmed said. "We allowed these factors to take precedent over his behavior toward his older sons. Sadly, tragically, this was the wrong decision."

And illegal, Sen. Mark Jansen, R-Gaines Township, said after the hearing. He said the legislative questioning revealed that Montcalm DHS officials had no choice under Michigan child protection law but to ignore all those other factors and remove Nicholas from his father's home. Jansen, the committee chair, said the next step for the committee would be to monitor whether individual workers involved in the case are held responsible.

"If you break the law, there are ramifications and so I want to know what those are," Jansen said. "I'm expecting an answer and if, in the end, there aren't any ramifications, that appears to be a problem."

Yager said there is an investigation as to why the law was not followed, but declined to say after the hearing why it was not, citing confidentiality rules. He told committee members all child protection staff in Michigan are receiving updated legal training.

Ahmed said a case coordinator had been hired in the Montcalm County office to implement "team decision-making" on child removal and placement decisions. He said a review of other cases handled in the county would be completed by May 30.

He said child protection offices in Saginaw and Montcalm counties would implement procedural "checklists" to ensure proper steps are taken during investigations. The Saginaw office was faulted in the February report for failing to ensure that Jasinski secured legal custody of her children after substantiating a 2004 allegation of child abuse by Oliver Braman.

Ahmed said Montcalm DHS officials and the Friend of the Court in that county would develop protocols for better cooperation between the two agencies.

Jasinski praised the oversight DHS has undergone in this case, but she said common sense, not rules, would have saved her son's life.

Child protection workers "have a tough job and I totally agree with that," she said. "They have to find the right balance. And they can overreact, or underreact."

"But when they overreact, usually no one dies," she said.

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Mich. lawmakers look into state's actions before boy's death

4/29/2008, 8:03 p.m. ET

By DAVID EGGERT
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — A top state official responsible for child welfare told lawmakers Tuesday his agency didn't do enough to protect a 9-year-old boy who was killed by his father in a rural county northeast of Grand Rapids.

Nicholas Braman died in October after his dad, Oliver Braman, used a combination of an over-the-counter pain medication and carbon monoxide gas to kill his new wife, the boy and himself in Montcalm County's Douglass Township.

State caseworkers previously had intervened to protect Nicholas Braman's older siblings from child abuse inflicted by their father. But Nicholas Braman continued living with his dad after the boy and his brothers said he hadn't been mistreated. Oliver Braman pleaded guilty to felony child abuse in September after authorities said he had used an electric cattle prod on two teenage sons.

"We could have and should have done more," Michigan Department of Human Services Director Ismael Ahmed told the Senate Family and Human Services Committee.

Ahmed said safety must be the agency's highest priority even while balancing the trauma a child sustains when he or she is removed from the home.

Steve Yager, director of DHS' Office of the Family Advocate, said state law was broken when caseworkers didn't remove Nicholas Braman from his home after Oliver Braman pleaded guilty to child abuse.

The boy's mother, Becki Jasinski of Saginaw County, told committee members about how he loved cars and planes and liked to twist his fingers in her hair when she walked to communion at church.

"I want to know not only how a governmental agency that is founded on the principle of children's safety and well-being could so not do their job?" she said. "How is it that it has gotten this bad?"

DHS is reviewing whether to discipline employees involved in the Braman case. The department hired a family-to-family coordinator in Montcalm County, staff there have been trained about domestic abuse and violence, and caseworkers will be required to complete a checklist to ensure compliance with policies and the law.

"We cannot bring Nicholas back to his mother or his brothers, but we have made important changes to protect other children like him," Ahmed said.

Children's Ombudsman Verlie Ruffin also updated senators about her office's review of the case. She made seven recommendations — three calling for more staff training, two changing practices, one changing the law and one addressing personnel performance. Ruffin recommended requiring Friend of the Court employees — who handle child support, spousal support and parental custody cases — to report suspected child abuse to Children's Protective Services.

Stacie Bladen, an investigator with the ombudsman's office, was asked if there were communications problems since caseworkers in two counties — Saginaw and Montcalm — dealt with the Braman case. She said there weren't.

"People would say they communicated clearly but people receiving the information weren't willing to take action," she said. "It came down to decision-making by DHS and the Friend of the Court."

DHS officials said caseworkers, the child's lawyer guardian ad-litem, parenting instructors and a therapist all reported that Oliver Braman appeared to be taking positive steps to ensure a safe home for his son. They also said he had appeared to accept past responsibility for his actions and was responding well to intervention.

But Jasinski said state workers should have known that an abuser is most dangerous when he's about to lose control of his family. She also criticized the legal system for letting Braman have custody of their children in the first place.

Senate Family and Human Services Chairman Mark Jansen, a Republican from Kent County's Gaines Township, said he will follow whether DHS workers are disciplined in the case.

"We have to ask ourselves, 'What can we do more to prevent something like this from happening?'" Jansen said.

He added, however, that government can't always stop people from doing bad things.

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18-month-old girl drowns in Romulus

By ERIC D. LAWRENCE • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • April 29, 2008

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An 18-month-old girl drowned in a retention pond at the Pinewoods Circle Apartment complex in Romulus today, according to Romulus Police.

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The girl, who was not identified, was carried from the water to the shore by a relative, police said.

It was unclear how the girl made it into the pond; investigating officers were not available to comment late tonight. Police said they arrived at the scene minutes after receiving a 911 call just before 3 p.m. and, along with firefighters, performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation on the girl. She was taken to Oakwood Annapolis Hospital in Wayne, where she was pronounced dead, police said.

The Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office said there were no obvious signs of foul play, and an autopsy was scheduled for Wednesday.

Find this article at:

<http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080429/NEWS02/80429112>

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2-year-old in sister's care nearly drowns

BY KORIE WILKINS • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • APRIL 30, 2008

Authorities are investigating the near drowning of a 2-year-old boy who was being watched by his 9-year-old sister in Commerce Township.

According to the Oakland County Sheriff's Office, deputies were called to a home on the 2200 block of Gage in the Stratford Villa mobile home park at about 6:46 p.m. Tuesday. The sister had apparently taken the boy to a nearby pond to go fishing. She went home to use the bathroom, leaving her brother at the pond. When she returned, the boy was facedown in the water and unresponsive.

He had started breathing and crying when medical help arrived and was taken to Huron Valley-Sinai Hospital and then the University of Michigan Medical Center for treatment.

He is expected to make a full recovery, officials say.

Child Protective Services has been notified of the incident.

Probe continues into boy's death at Swartz Creek Middle School pool; Roberto Anderson didn't know how to swim, family attorney says

by Robyn Rosenthal | The Swartz Creek News and Bryn Mickle | The Flint Journal

Wednesday April 30, 2008, 8:19 AM

SWARTZ CREEK, Michigan -- It was the first day of swim classes, and 12-year-old Roberto Anderson did not know how to swim, an attorney for the boy's family says.

Roberto's family and friends, police and the Swartz Creek School District continue to cope with and investigate Roberto's death Monday, five days after he was found unconscious in the Swartz Creek Middle School's pool during the morning class April 23.

Police and school officials said they won't comment on findings until they finish investigating.

"It's an unspeakable tragedy," said Farmington Hills attorney Michael Battersby, who said his firm is conducting an independent investigation. School officials have not conducted swim classes at the middle school since last week's incident. School Superintendent Jeff Pratt said the district is reviewing its internal policies and procedures for pool safety.

The district has taught students to swim safely for more than 30 years without incident before Roberto's death, said Pratt.

The county had just done a routine inspection on the pool April 14 and found no problems, said Brian McKenzie, the Genesee County Health Department's environmental health supervisor.

Among Battersby's concerns are exactly how long Roberto was under water and how long it took for an ambulance to respond.

Two classes, overseen by two instructors and an aide, were in the pool when someone saw Roberto under the surface and not moving.

One of the adults pulled him out, and rescue efforts included cardiopulmonary resuscitation and the use of a school defibrillators.

Records show a police car was dispatched within 28 seconds of the call and an ambulance less than a minute later, police said.

Police have not released a full timeline showing when the ambulance arrived at the school.

Roberto was taken first to McLaren Regional Medical Center, then transferred a short time later to Hurley Medical Center, where he died Monday afternoon.

His mother had the boy's organs donated, said Battersby.

Pratt said counselors and social workers from throughout the county were at the middle school on Tuesday to help students, staff and parents with their grief.

"It will be ongoing as long as needed," Pratt said.

Roberto, a [Swartz Creek Middle School](#) sixth-grader, was remembered as someone who liked a good joke -- sometimes going to his favorite social studies class during the wrong hour and waiting for the teacher to notice.

"He always had a smile on his face," said Roberto's sixth-grade science teacher, Paul Speck.

Several teachers worked with their classes to pen words and phrases that described Roberto -- like "prankster," "always smiling" and "good friend."

"It's hard to understand he's not coming back. A lot of kids can't believe it actually happened," said Speck.

Parent Shannon Hicks said she was shocked by the death.

Her daughter is a seventh-grader at the school and has gone through the same swim classes.

"My heart and condolences go out to the mother," said Hicks.

All of the district's schools have been raising money to help Roberto's family.

His mother, Maria, works in the food service industry and has a younger son, Phillip.

The boys' father is dead.

Staff at [Syring Elementary School](#), which Roberto's brother attends, also have taken a collection, said Principal Lauren Hunter.

"Everyone that I've spoken to ... has just been sharing their grief that the parents are experiencing. It's just a reminder to every individual how precious life is," Pratt said.

Roberto's family has asked for privacy and declined comment through a [funeral home](#) spokesman.

Funeral service times:

- **Funeral services** for Roberto Anderson are at 11 a.m. Friday at St. Mary Queen of Angels Catholic Church, [7563 Mary St.](#), Swartz Creek.

- **Visitation** is from 2-9 p.m. Thursday at Sharp Funeral Homes, Miller Road Chapel, [8138 Miller Road](#), Swartz Creek.
- **Memorial donations** can be made to the family at the funeral home.

Despite overturned murder conviction, Donna Yost will remain behind bars

Posted by [Crystal McMorris | The Bay City Times](#)

April 30, 2008 08:09AM



Cathy Layman | Times Photo

Donna Yost appeared before Bay County Circuit Judge William J. Caprathe and asked that she be released from prison now that her conviction for the murder of her daughter, Monique, has been overturned.

Despite the fact that the Michigan's Court of Appeals has thrown out Donna A. Yost's murder conviction and life sentence, the former Bay City woman will not taste freedom anytime soon.

Bay County Circuit Judge William J. Caprathe issued a written ruling on Tuesday denying bond to Yost, 49.

"The court saw and heard the evidence at trial and is aware of the defendant's history of child abuse; and therefore, cannot find that the defendant will not pose a danger to other persons," Caprathe wrote in his three-page order. "Also this court is aware that there are substantial questions of law or fact that can be raised by the prosecution in an application for leave to appeal."

After a series of conflicting legal rulings, appeals and reversals, Yost was convicted in April 2006 of first-degree murder for the 1999 death of her 7-year-old daughter, Monique. Monique died after apparently ingesting a fatal

dose of anti-depressant medication at her Madison Street home while home with her mother on a Sunday afternoon.

The Bay County Prosecutor's Office has not yet filed an application with the Michigan Supreme Court to appeal the March 27 Appeals Court ruling, but Bay County Prosecutor Kurt C. Asbury has indicated that he plans to do so within the 56-day period allowed.

Last week, Yost was brought up from the Scott Correctional Facility to plead with Caprathe for her freedom, saying she "didn't do nothin' wrong" and wanted the chance to attend her daughter's wedding, which was last Saturday.

Yost's attorney, Edward M. Czuprynski, asked Caprathe to release Yost on a personal recognizance bond - one that doesn't require posting any money - since she is indigent and should be presumed innocent since her conviction had been tossed out.

Czuprynski said he plans to ask Caprathe to reconsider his ruling, calling it inappropriate. Czuprynski, who had represented Yost at the jury trial Caprathe presided over, said Yost is no danger to anyone.

He points out that the evidence presented at the trial about previous child abuse by Yost was among the evidence that the appeals panel deemed inadmissible, and also that Yost's children are now all adults.

The so-called "bad acts" testimony allowed by Caprathe focused on previous episodes of alleged violence by Yost against Monique and her other children and previous incidents where children in Yost's care had gotten into medications. The appeals court ruled that testimony was improperly admitted, since it did not establish a pattern of conduct and because it was likely to inflame the jury.

The appeals court also ruled that Caprathe improperly prevented the defense from calling a toxicology expert to counter testimony by the medical examiner who conducted Monique's autopsy. Dr. Kanu Virani had testified at Yost's trial that a 7-year-old child is incapable of committing suicide but a defense expert was barred from testifying after attorneys missed a deadline for providing written notice of intent to add a witness.

The appeals court also ruled Caprathe erred in not allowing Yost's defense attorney to present evidence of her low IQ and history of unusual behavior as a way of explaining her reaction to her daughter's death, which several police and medical witnesses classified as "odd." She did not, for example, want to ride in the ambulance that was rushing her daughter to Bay Regional Medical Center, and a nurse described Yost as alternating from hysterical to emotionless at the hospital.

After Yost's initial arrest in the case, Bay County District Judge John C. Leaming ruled, after a six-week preliminary examination of the evidence, that prosecutors did not have enough evidence against Yost to merit a trial. Caprathe overturned Leaming's ruling, however, beginning a series of appeals that went all the way to the state's supreme court, which ordered Yost to stand trial. A jury convicted her of first-degree felony murder, which does not require premeditation. First-degree felony murder is a killing that occurs during the commission of other specific crimes, including first-degree child abuse, a charge on which the jury also convicted Yost. First-degree murder conviction carries a mandatory sentence of life in prison without possibility of parole.

During the five years between her initially being charged and her first trial, Yost was free on her own recognizance. She was living in Pinconning most of that time. Czuprynski noted that she reported for all court dates and would not be a flight risk.

Caprathe indicated that the prosecution has 56 days from March 27 to file its application with the state supreme court. The judge sided with Assistant Bay County Prosecutor Sylvia Linton, who argued that while an appeal or application to appeal is pending, a defendant convicted of an assaultive crime may only be released on bail if a judge decides she is not a danger to others and that her appeal "raises a substantial question of law."

Czuprynski said he plans today to file an official motion for reconsideration, a formal request for the judge to change his mind.

Taylor school bus driver pulled over for 'erratic driving'

BY PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI • FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITER
• APRIL 30, 2008

A bus driver for the Taylor School District was relieved of duty this morning after local police pulled the vehicle over for what was called “erratic” driving.

In an e-mailed press release, the school district said a police officer believed the driver was “somehow impaired” at the time of the incident. Neither the district nor Taylor police would elaborate.

The students on the bus were transferred to another bus and transported to school.

The press release does not say how many students were involved or what school they attended.

The bus driver has been relieved of duty pending the results of an investigation.

“Our first concern is for the children,” interim superintendent Bethany Iverson said in a statement. “I have spoken to the principal and he has informed me that the students appear to be fine.”

Contact **PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI** at 586-826-7262 or mmwalsh@freepress.com.

ClickOnDetroit.com

Taylor School Bus Driver Removed For Erratic Driving

POSTED: 10:27 am EDT April 30, 2008

UPDATED: 11:18 am EDT April 30, 2008

TAYLOR, Mich. -- A bus driver for the Taylor School District was reported to be driving "erratically" Wednesday morning and was pulled over by police until the driver could be replaced, according to a news release from the superintendent.

The officer believed the driver, who was carrying a busload of kids, was "somehow impaired," according to the release.

Lt. Mark Tonge of the Taylor Police Department called Bethany Iverson, interim superintendent for Taylor Schools, to let her know of the situation and that police are just beginning their investigation, Iverson said in the news release.

The bus driver has been suspended from driving until after the investigation is complete, Iverson said.

"Our first concern is the children," Iverson said in a statement. "The principal of (the) school is talking to students who were on the bus to make sure they are OK.

"I spoke with the principal and he has informed me that the students appear to be fine."

Stay with ClickOnDetroit.com and Local 4 for more on this developing story.

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Wayland teen says he left willingly for Tennessee

Wednesday, April 30, 2008

By Theresa D. McClellan
The Grand Rapids Press

WAYLAND -- Wesley Ayers is coming home, and two men police say left the state with the Wayland teen are being held in a Tennessee jail on charges of property theft.

The 15-year-old boy, who was the focus of an Amber Alert this week, was found Tuesday, sleeping in a stolen minivan with the suspects in a Wal-Mart parking lot about midway between Chattanooga and Knoxville in southeastern Tennessee.

The teen told authorities he willingly left with the suspects, said Wayland Police Chief Dan Miller.

But the chief described the 6-foot, 240-pound teen as "a vulnerable individual."

"I don't think he's a person who can really say no to anybody. He's a follower. I'm thinking that's how he got there," Miller said.

The teen left his home early Saturday, and police issued the Amber Alert on Monday after learning Wesley likely left town with Dana Rider, 24, a convicted sex offender, and 19-year-old neighbor Kasey Giffin.

Wesley met Rider on Friday at a Wayland park, the chief said.

Authorities got a break Monday when a stolen car linked to the trio was found in Indiana, where they allegedly took another vehicle. Investigators narrowed Wesley's whereabouts through Amber Alert responses and possible sightings, and from cell phone traffic.

Miller did not know whether Wesley was harmed during his four-day absence. The teen told police he was not molested.

"He says not. But, then again, I'd have my suspicions. ... I'd hope he wasn't, but things didn't add up, such as the fact he went with them," Miller said.

Giffin and Rider likely will be charged with motor vehicle theft and could face additional charges from the FBI in Michigan, said Tennessee state police spokesman Mike Browning. They are to be arraigned Thursday for theft of property over \$10,000, and remain in the McMinn County Jail.

Rider is no stranger to authorities.

In 1999, he was 15 when he was charged with molesting a relative. His case was adjudicated through the juvenile probation system in Marquette County, police said.

In 2002, according to state police records, the 19-year-old Rider was convicted of molesting another teen boy and served five years in prison.

Send e-mail to the author: tmcclellan@grpress.com

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DESIREE COOPER

Abuse is real, but so are ties

BY DESIREE COOPER • FREE PRESS COLUMNIST • April 30, 2008

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This week, Texas Child Protective Services reported that of the 53 girls between the ages of 14 and 17 taken from the Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints compound 31 have either given birth or are expecting a child.

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That seems to validate suspicions that young girls on the Yearning for Zion Ranch are being stabled for the benefit of older men. The girls who are being abused -- and the boys who are being raised to become their abusers -- are in danger and should be removed from their families.

But the cure might emotionally devastate the more than 400 children who have been ripped from their birth mothers for nearly a month now. The children's pain is multiplied by separation from the other "sister wives" in their polygamous households. I hope that authorities are equally sensitive to the reality that these children are being traumatized by separation from members of their families who are not their kin.

Family attachments are often about social attachments, not blood relationships. You don't have to be raised on a compound to know that sometimes water is as thick as blood.

Member of the family

It's an old story: A family takes in a needy child or a friendly neighbor. Before you know it, the adoptee has a branch on the family tree.

My "Aunt" Helen was my mother's best friend when the women were young military wives living in Japan. I grew up considering her a blood relative, and her five sons were my boisterous "cousins." My husband's childhood friend has been so close to our family that our kids think of him as "Uncle Duck."

Detroit's Margaret Keys-Howard had a similar experience. When she was about 4, her mother asked her to look out of the window for a little boy crossing the street.

"She said that his mother had to work late and would not be home to let him in -- he was to come to our house," said

Margaret. "I saw the big-headed boy with glasses and a cool 'Lost in Space' lunchbox walk to our house, and the story was written. He had a key and the full privileges and responsibilities of all of my mom's eight other kids. Some 40-plus years later, Leon is my 'brother.' "

To imagine being separated because he was not her real brother would have been unthinkable. "Leon is a permanent part of my life," she said.

Consider the children

It will take months to determine if the Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints children were living in an abusive family environment. In the meantime, authorities should be prepared to deal with the authentic grief of separation each child is bound to feel. Grief not just for their birth mothers and full siblings, but for the many other people they had come to know as family.

Contact **DESIREE COOPER** at dcooper@freepress.com. Listen to her on public radio's "Weekend America," 2-4 p.m. Saturdays on WUOM-FM (91.7) or www.weekendamerica.org.

Find this article at:

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Roger Caswell, father of a girl killed in a car crash, granted visitation with his other daughter

by Shannon Murphy | The Flint Journal

Wednesday April 30, 2008, 7:20 AM

FENTON, Michigan -- The father of Kasey Caswell, a Fenton girl whose twin sister died in a car accident, Tuesday was granted unsupervised visitation with his daughter.

"This is a request I welcome," said Circuit Judge David Newblatt, who took jurisdiction over Kasey, 8, earlier this month. "As far as the effect on the child, I feel it would only be a good thing for the child."

Kasey has been staying with her paternal grandmother since a March 10 accident that killed her sister, Kelsey Caswell.

Her mother, Kelly Arthurs, was driving their sport utility vehicle when it crashed into a utility pole on Fenton Road in Mundy Township.

Officials allege Arthurs, who is facing termination of her parental rights, used cocaine hours before the crash. No criminal charges have been filed against Arthurs.

Arthurs is not allowed to have any contact with Kasey and on Tuesday Newblatt added a stipulation to her neglect case that she also not have contact with Roger Caswell, the girls' father. The two are not married.

Roger Caswell earlier Tuesday filed a petition for a personal protection order against Arthurs, claiming she contacted him Monday evening demanding to see her daughter and come to his home.

Arthurs' attorney, Lynne Taft, said her client only wanted to see Kasey's bedroom. Taft had planned to contest the PPO petition, but Newblatt instead dismissed it and put the no contact stipulation into Arthurs' neglect case.

A trial date for termination of Arthurs' parental rights has been set for June 12.

Roger Caswell, who was not involved in the crash, was ordered earlier this month to follow several recommendations set forth by the court and the Department of Human Services in order to regain custody of Kasey.

His attorney, Geoff Lahn, said Caswell has done so, including enrolling himself and Kasey in therapy and submitting to drug tests.

"We came to the consensus this morning that Mr. Caswell has done what was required of him," Lahn said. "He's had supervised visitation with DHS and more at his mother's. That is going very well."

State agency officials agreed that visitation is going well, but said it is too soon for Kasey to be returned to her father's custody and said overnight visits were to occur at the grandmother's home.

Karen Bunker, who is representing Kasey, said the girl has said she would like to visit with her father and take him to a garden where a memorial was planted for her sister.

"What she wants and needs is contact with her father," Bunker said. "She doesn't want to see mom or the maternal side."

Newblatt agreed that it would be good for Kasey to spend more time with her father.

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Session to focus on domestic violence

By Audrey LaFave

POSTED: April 29, 2008

ESCANABA — Thanks to a grant from the Community Foundation, the Alliance Against Violence and Abuse is putting on a training session for local professionals who may come across domestic violence.

Emily Jurmu, STOP advocate for the Alliance, said Herb Tanner, Lansing, will be the featured speaker at this Friday's all-day training session at the House of Ludington.

"(Herb's been) contracted to do all sorts of training manuals and speaking engagements," said Jurmu. "We were very fortunate to get him to come up to Upper Michigan for this training."

Tanner is an attorney who began in

private practice. He has been a chief assistant prosecutor downstate and now teaches at Cooley Law School in Lansing. The Alliance currently has 65-70 people signed up to attend the training and there is room for more.

"I'm trying to get all the professionals together who are going to potentially be in a position to identify domestic violence," said Jurmu. "Then they can bring the knowledge back to their own department and really focus on how it applies to them and how they can improve their services."

Topics covered at the training will range from understanding batterers, investigating and documenting domestic violence, recognizing specific kinds of violence, such as strangulation, to court responses including bond setting and probation violations, and community response.

Jurmu explained professionals in law enforcement like police, prosecutors, judges and probation/parole agents, as well as legislative assistants, medical professionals, school employees and social workers from a variety of fields can benefit from the training.

"It's an educational tool for professionals, so we can better serve victims and hold offenders accountable for their actions," said Jurmu. "The more eyes and ears we have out there — if we all see where we fit in, we can see how all our roles compliment each other."

Delta County Sheriff Gary Ballweg said he has been on the Domestic Violence Task Force committee for more than 10 years and he has found it sometimes difficult to get deputies trained in specialized fields because of the location of the U.P.

"We have a hard time getting training here to the U.P.," said Ballweg. "So, when the opportunity came up to hold this training here we jumped at the chance and encouraged and supported it."

As of last week the Delta County Sheriff's Department had 10 road patrol officers signed up to attend the

Article Photos



Gary Ballweg

training.

"We are (able to) attend since it's being held here locally," said Ballweg. "If it was being held downstate or somewhere else farther away we may not be able to go or may only be able to send one or two (deputies)."

Jurmu said the Alliance has participants from Delta, Menominee, Schoolcraft and Dickinson counties.

"Herb Tanner is really able to show all professionals where they fit in in solving this problem," said Jurmu. "It's one of those things that all our local communities can benefit from."

Contact Emily Jurmu at the Alliance Against Domestic Violence and Abuse, (906) 789-9207, for more information or to sign up for the training.

The training is from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday at the House of Ludington and includes a lunch and is free of charge, with the exception of nurses or social workers seeking continuing education credits.

The idea for this training came up at a Domestic Violence Task Force meeting a few months ago. The task force meets once a month in Delta County to brainstorm and discuss the problem of domestic violence in the area. Members include police officers from all local branches, prosecutors, social workers, Bay College personnel and more.

"I am thrilled that what began as a discussion during task force has grown into a true community project that will improve services offered to victims of domestic violence in our area," said Jurmu.

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Free medical clinic to help the uninsured

By DIANE SPEER, News Lifestyles Editor

POSTED: April 28, 2008

The survey statistics are several years old, but Steve Hammond, pastor at First Presbyterian Church, still finds them disturbing. According to the 2003 numbers, 3,000 people in Alpena County lack any kind of medical insurance.

"Those are not recent numbers," Hammond said. "I suspect the numbers have increased or at least the number of people who are under-insured has increased."

With dual careers in both the ministry and the medical field, Hammond has taken the lead in galvanizing his church, other local medical professionals, health organizations and the community to establish a free health clinic.

Now open two evenings a week since mid-March, the clinic is located at the Presbyterian Church, 1600 W. Chisholm, in a large former Sunday School room that has been converted into three separate exam rooms.

The new service, called the Free Clinic of Alpena, is staffed by all volunteers. It will provide medical care and health education to the uninsured and under-insured of the region through direct primary care and through community partnerships with other health care organizations.

Dr. Henry Stibitz, now retired, serves as medical director. Five other area doctors and numerous physician's assistants also are giving of their time to staff the clinic that is operated by a 14-member community-based board of directors.

Office hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6-8:30 p.m. Walk-in patients may be seen if time permits and staff are available, but appointments are encouraged so the clinic can have the appropriate number of volunteers available.

Though the clinic has not been advertised much to date, patients are already finding their way to the facility.

"This is a place where they can come and not be judged or be fearful of incurring some kind of bill," Hammond said, adding that patients are not required to prove their financial need to receive free health care.

Participating in a free health clinic is not a new concept for Hammond, who moved to Alpena in 2004. He started out his career in church work in a small community in Idaho where the town's closest physician was located 40 miles away. He ended up going back to school to obtain a physician's assistant degree, before returning to that community to work.

Eventually he became a full-time physician's assistant, although he continued to do substitute ministry work. He also was a faculty member for six years at the Family Practice Residency Program in Spokane, Wash.

Article Photos



Steven Hammond, pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Alpena, helped to start a free medical clinic that will be staffed by local volunteer doctors, physician's assistants and other medical personnel.

Fact Box

Free Clinic of Alpena
Located inside
First Presbyterian Church,
1600 W. Chisholm
Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays,
6:30-8 p.m.
Call 354-3888 for appointments

Clinic open house
and dedication:
April 28, 7 p.m.

A stint serving as an interim pastor of a church made him realize that he wanted to live in a place where he could do both — be a pastor and a physician's assistant. Alpena offered that chance between the First Presbyterian Church pastorate and a position he previously held at Baybrook Medical Center but has since given up.

For the past year and a half, Hammond has met and worked with others in the community to first explore the need for a free clinic, and then to help establish it. His congregation has been supportive of the effort, he said.

"This is a result of evaluating the need, exploring with other people such as the Alcona Health Center, the Health Department, Alpena Regional Medical Center and individuals who expressed an interest in moving forward with the creation of a clinic," Hammond said.

Currently, Michigan has 52 other free clinics located around the state. The Free Clinics of Michigan organization assisted with the formation of Alpena's new clinic by providing start-up information. The Presbytery of Mackinaw provided a \$4,000 seed grant.

"Since then, there's been a lot of community support, individual grants and a grant from the Community Foundation for Northeast Michigan that have helped to buy medical equipment," Hammond said. "There is a whole list of people who have contributed."

The clinic also received donations of computers and two exam tables from ARMC as well as in-kind donations of electrical and plumbing work necessary to get the facility up and running.

Hammond said the clinic is here to help people, including those with acute illnesses and those needing assistance in managing chronic illnesses.

"Most free clinics seem to get loaded up with diabetics, hypertension and depression," he said. "That's the mainstay of the folks, and they're mainly between the ages of 19 and 64."

The clinic will not keep drugs on the premises. Staff will be prescribing generic brands of drugs and helping people with different online drug programs offered through pharmaceutical companies.

A special open house and dedication is planned April 28 at the clinic. The public is invited to attend. For more information about the facility or to make a medical appointment, call 354-3888.

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THE BAY CITY TIMES

Health system to host food give-away

Tuesday, April 29, 2008

TAWAS CITY - In Iosco, Ogemaw, Alcona, Arenac and Oscoda counties, 7,000 adults and 1,500 children lack health care coverage, according to St. Joseph Health Care System in Tawas City.

To promote National

Cover the Uninsured Week, HealthKey, a service of St. Joseph Health System, plans two events.

At noon Friday, the community will join in an Uninsured Awareness Walk beginning at the Healing Garden and follows US-23 to Newman Street, before returning.

Then a food give-away will assist folks in need. The drive is from 2- 4 p.m. in the Horizon Center parking area. Last year, the drive helped 500 families. Participants are encouraged to bring their own box and there is a one box limit per family.

For details, call (989) 362-9755 or 1-800-279-9085.

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Michigan Department of Human Services News Release

Contact: Jan Berry (517) 373-7394 or
Regina Funkhouser, Michigan Heart Gallery coordinator (800) 589-6273
Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange

Michigan Heart Gallery 2008 Exhibit in Kalamazoo Exhibit helps find adoptive families for foster children

April 30, 2008

What: The 2008 Michigan Heart Gallery, a touring photographic exhibit featuring stirring portraits of 60 Michigan foster children who are waiting to be adopted, is on display at the Park Trades Center, Art Hop Gallery in Kalamazoo May 1-3. The photographs in the Heart Gallery were taken by more than 40 professional photographers who donated their time, talent and resources to take the pictures that help capture the spirit of the children in the foster care system.

The Michigan Heart Gallery is a collaborative effort between the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, the Adoptive Family Support Network and the Michigan Department of Human Services. Today, in Michigan, there are more than 4,000 children without families. Recruitment activities such as the Heart Gallery remind people that there are many children in Michigan who are waiting to be adopted into a loving and caring home.

When: May 1 - 3

Where: Park Trades Center, Art Hop Gallery, 326 W. Kalamazoo Avenue, Kalamazoo, Michigan

Ten Things you should know:

1. At any given time there are about 4,000 children in Michigan's foster care system who are available and waiting to be adopted.
2. Last year in Michigan almost 2,600 children were adopted through Michigan's foster care system.
3. Most families who adopt are also licensed foster parents or relatives. In fact, last year in Michigan, 93 percent of children adopted from the foster care system were adopted by a foster parent or relative.
4. All adoptive families must go through a family assessment process that includes an education component, background checks, and an exploration of the family's interest in adopting.
5. Because the needs of each child are different, many different types of families are needed. You don't have to be married to adopt, and you don't need to be wealthy or own your own home.
6. Many of the children waiting for adoption are school-age or older, may need to be adopted along with siblings, or may have special placement needs.
7. About 500 Michigan children between the ages of 18 and 21 transition or "age out" of the foster care system annually. Studies of youths who have left foster care without being adopted have shown they are more likely than those in the general population to not finish high school, be unemployed, and be dependent on public assistance. Many find themselves in prison, homeless, or becoming parents at an early age.
8. The Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange is an information and referral program that can help answer some of your questions about adoption. Contact us at (800) 589-6273 or visit our Web site at www.mare.org
9. The Heart Gallery is a project of the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange. It is our hope the Michigan Heart Gallery will inspire prospective parents to adopt an older child so these children can become part of a loving family and have a chance for a brighter, happier future.

10. Consider fostering, adopting or mentoring a waiting child!